

## Book Review | *Debating the Ethics of Immigration: Is There A Right To Exclude?*

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Published online: 1 August 2012

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***Debating the Ethics of Immigration: Is There A Right To Exclude?; Christopher Heath Wellman & Phillip Cole; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; 313 pages; 978-0-19-9731713-2.***

This is an imaginative, wide-ranging, maddeningly unstructured book. It is probably fair to say that no argument remotely relevant to the immigration issue fails to be mentioned, and to some degree or other, explored. For this the authors deserve great credit. But it has a kind of late night talk radio free associative quality, as one matter swiftly leads to another, at least in the authors' heads, and wild counterfactuals and hyperbolic descriptions abound like Mexicans in Imperial County. For all the twists and turns in these essays, for all the leaps of imagination, the arguments are sometimes themselves couched in needlessly narrow terms. For example, while the argument that would oppose a right to immigrate would lean, understandably, on a nation's right to self determination, the possibility that *this* idea might be tied to circumstances more or less fragile, and so to reasons more or less deep, is never seriously explored. Wellman consistently presents the policy of exclusion as an expression of our collective right just "not to associate" with whoever we just want not to associate with (see chapter 1, "In Defense of the Right to Exclude"). But sometimes the interest in exclusion expresses a well founded worry about the form cultural continuity would take. Estonians have reasons to worry about significant immigration from nearby Russia in a way the Chinese do not, however many Laotians were to cross their border. Nor is there enough discussion of the way the different kind of reasons for immigration may rightly overcome reasonable exclusion policies. Let us assume that every country that refused entrance to

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Jews fleeing Germany in the 1930s had reasonable, defensible, immigration policies. But that seems neither here nor there in light of the particular reasons these people had to emigrate in this case. Finally, at least in this writer's opinion, there is insufficient attention to the way immigration policies are inevitably tied to, or expressive of, a country's political ideals, and so its sense of self. As a result, it may be misleading, even pointless, to consider this issue in terms of "countries" and what "people" in those "countries" have a "right" to do, or not to do. I have no interest in even *talking* about getting Saudi Arabia to have more enlightened immigration policies. This seems utterly silly to me. It is more important, given the ideals America holds, or France holds, (or, in each case, thinks it holds) that countries like these figure out policies that are congruent with the ideals they believe they can endorse. The issue has a deep connection to the distinctive contours of particular states, to political self expression. The authors talk about it in terms of abstract rights and reasons. Within that framework, this is an energetic and lively work. But for just these reasons, it is also a frustrating one.